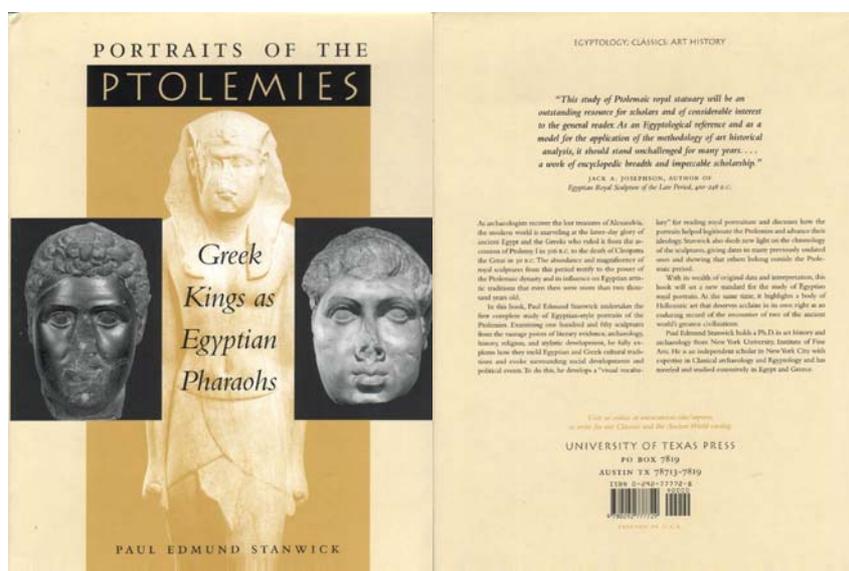


Stanwick, P.E. 2003. Portraits of the Ptolemies. Greek kings as Egyptian pharaohs. – Austin, University of Texas Press

Book review by K.M. Cooney



Paul Edmund Stanwick's 'Portraits of the Ptolemies. Greek kings as Egyptian pharaohs' is a major new contribution to the scholarship of ancient Egypt. Stanwick was a student of Bothmer and thus had access to the massive amounts of research and photographs produced but not published by this late Egyptologist, formally referred to as the 'Corpus of Late Egyptian Sculpture', now in the archives of the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. This book 'Portraits of the Ptolemies' finds its source in Bothmer's vast and unpublished work, but Stanwick has moved beyond the work of his predecessor and many of Bothmer's outdated methodologies into a contextual art historical study that bridges divides between the fields of Egyptology and Classical studies. Although obviously art historical in focus, the book is a true contextual work, and Stanwick attacks his research with every tool available to him: visual, textual, archaeological, architectural, glyptic and historical, providing a new and essential piece of research for studies of the Ptolemaic period.

The work is separated into eight chapters with two appendices. In chapter 1, entitled 'A unique vantage point', Stanwick provides a short historical introduction of the entire period as well as a useful review of the scholarly literature thus far, including discussion of Egyptologists Von Bissing (1914), Bothmer (1960), Bianchi & Fazzini (1988), and Josephson (1997), as well as Classicists Kyrieleis (1975) and Smith (1988, 1991). Stanwick's aim is to "correct the imbalance" produced by the varying perspectives, prejudices, and methodologies of Egyptology and Classics. The main goal of this contextual approach is (p. 4) "to construct an Egyptological framework for understanding sculptures that have been predominantly viewed from a classicist perspective."

Chapter 2, entitled 'The priestly decrees', tackles the textual context of Ptolemaic royal portraiture and statuary. These texts, often produced in three scripts, provide information directly related to image production, including the setting, pose, material, attributes and political and religious ideology associated with the image. In particular he focuses on the 3rd century BCE Canopus decree and Raphia decree, and the early 2nd century BCE Memphis decree, Philensis I decree, and Philensis II decree, each of which tried to (p. 11) "set a national agenda for royal imagery." Each decree seems to have been produced after a synod of Egyptian priests, either by the temple or the royal house. They involve various subject matters, including the royal jubilee, military victories, the royal coronation, the overthrow of a rebellion, the accession of a new Apis bull, and the proposed artistic program to celebrate each event. He examines a number of words associated with images in these decrees, both Egyptian and Greek, and this lexicographical discussion is new and groundbreaking, providing many new meanings for outdated translations. First he looks at the *hnti* (hieroglyphic), *twtw* (Demotic), and *eikon* (Greek), determining that two-dimensional images are usually meant by these words, not statuary, although in some cases, the words *twt* and *rpi* (Egyptian) as well as *eikon* (Greek) do refer to large sculpted images. The most common described image in these decrees is the smiting scene, which, according to Stanwick, must be a two dimensional relief. He also examines the words *ssmt* (hieroglyphic), *sh̄m* (Demotic) and *xoanon* (Greek), which seem to describe small cult statuary contained in shrines. The priestly decrees suggest to Stanwick a priestly/temple workshop source for such cult images and statues meant to be placed in temple settings. The

reader wishes he had further examined the complex relationship between competing sources (native Egyptian and Ptolemaic royal house) of the artistic and architectural agendas set down in these decrees.

Chapter 3, called 'Conspicuous and other places' examines the geographic setting of Ptolemaic statuary, the Greek and/or Egyptian nature of the site, and the differing qualities levels of the statuary found at each location. Using new archaeological fieldwork as well as ancient accounts, he rebuilds the ancient architectural setting of the statuary, indicating that (p. 19) "the crux of this issue is whether the city possessed Egyptian temples and/or Egyptian-infused Greek ones in addition to purely Greek structures." He examines the multiple political and economic reasons for the building programs of various Ptolemaic rulers, travelling from Alexandria and Canopus which predominantly contains granite, colossal, high quality 2nd and 1st century BCE statuary in the Greek style, to the Fayoum where all statuary is limestone, about life size, and of medium quality, produced in a 'provincial' style, to Upper Egypt where statuary of limestone and dark stones is of medium to high quality, made in traditional Egyptian style, and dates to 3rd and 2nd century BCE predominantly. He does not tell the reader how he arrives at his quality assessment of each piece, but his attempt to align quality, stone type, and size to geographic location is valuable nonetheless.

Chapter 4, or 'A visual vocabulary', is an interpretive section on visual clues of royal and political ideology. This is an iconographic examination in true Bothmer fashion. He serializes and examines the meaning of the following visual clues within the Ptolemaic Hellenising context: *uraeus*, *nemes*, double crown, blue crown, ram horns, diadem, queens' crowns, hand held attributes, and garments. He also examines the meaning of some new trends, most beginning in the 2nd century, including statue groups of the royal family, monumental statues of queens, draped kings, and what the author calls 'Greek-style' hair.

In Chapter 5, 'Ideology and the royal visage', Stanwick discusses the royal ideology of the Ptolemaic kings, particular the four key concepts: ethics, piety, legitimacy, and 'Greekness'. His source material for this ideological discussion is varied and ranges from royal titularies, decree texts, and the statuary itself. The conceptual links between a king's titulary and his statue program are especially valuable. He also poses some key questions (p. 47): "why did 'Greekness' become such a visible ideology in the Egyptian portraits of the Ptolemies? Was it an expression of Greek superiority over Egyptians, or an indication of cultural integration?" He finds the mechanism to be 'mutual dependence': native Egyptian culture influenced the Greek and vice versa. The reasons for the increased 'Greekness' in Ptolemaic statuary are harder to arrive at. He suggests that the art program was a political strategy: Greek likenesses were favoured in the increasingly Hellenised north, while the traditional south was more attached to Egyptian style images. Stanwick claims that the differences between north and south are reflective of a 'deliberate choice' in the Ptolemaic art program by the kings themselves. Unfortunately, in this chapter, Stanwick's mutual dependence argument is not entirely clear. In some cases, he ignores the agency of native populations and priests when he claims the differences are the result of deliberate choices made by the royal house. However, it is equally possible that the southern regions were given a higher degree of self rule and freedom in their building programs, resulting in traditional statuary, as would benefit the cultural desires of the local population. On the other hand, he claims that the native priests still held a significant amount of control, because the 'Greekness' added to a statue was usually confined to the face, hair, and some other additional elements. The body, pose, and stone therefore remained Egyptian. Again, the conclusion that this limited 'Greekness' implies strong native control is a bit simplistic. Adding Greek elements to statuary otherwise of Egyptian style could easily have been a decision by the king himself, as he was trying to differentiate himself from other rulers of the Mediterranean basin and especially from other empires that found their origins with Alexander the Great.

Chapter 6, entitled 'Chronology', explains Stanwick's dating methodology. Dating is a huge issue, given the lack of inscribed Ptolemaic statuary. Stanwick therefore must rely on comparisons with portraits found on coins, sealings and Greek marbles. He also lays out a seriation of hair styles, distinctive regalia, facial features, and other markers. He separates the entire dynasty into stylistic time periods: 1) 3rd century BCE portraits; 2) Ptolemies V and VI; 3) The Physkons (Ptolemies VIII, IX, and X); 4) Ptolemy XII, Cleopatra VII and her son Ptolemy XV Caesarion; and 5) Augustus. The shift from the 3rd century to 2nd century BCE is marked by the increased introduction of Greek elements into the Ptolemaic statuary. Stanwick remarks (p. 61), "This is not, however, a simple trend of increasing hellenization with the passage of time. Rather, it is a shift from an Egyptian approach that excludes Greek ideas to one that selectively incorporates them."

Chapter 7, 'Powerful traditions, new dynamics,' moves through the statuary reign by reign. It is the prose element accompanying the volume's extensive catalogue, and it is quite easy to move from this chapter to the plates and figures at the back of the volume. Stanwick moves chronologically through his sculptural groups, discussing each time period's cultural context and possible links between the statuary program and political agendas.

Chapter 8, 'A generation of innovators', is a short discussion of craftsmen and workshops. Here Stanwick discusses three styles, and by extension, three major workshop groups: 1) The Hellenised style is seen most at Alexandria and Canopus; 2) The *mezzo* style is a local development seen in the Fayoum and other areas with

large Hellenised Egyptian populations; 3) The traditional style flourished in Memphis as well as in many sites in Upper Egypt. In conclusion, Stanwick (p. 88) claims that, “Royal portraits of the hellenized style did not copy Greek works. Rather, they invented a new idiom that creatively combined disparate cultural elements. By the time of Augustus, the style embraced Egyptian, Greek, and Roman.

Stanwick’s ‘Portraits of the Ptolemies’ includes two appendices, one examining the debates surrounding sculptor’s studies and another about questionable sculptures. The catalogue is organised according to Stanwick’s chronological groupings, enabling easy searches for particular pieces and time periods mentioned in his book. Each catalogue entry includes information about materials, dimensions, provenance and history, description and interpretation, inscriptions, and bibliography. This book is a valuable addition to the much neglected Ptolemaic period and its artistic agenda.

Stanwick, P.E. 2003. Portraits of the Ptolemies. Greek kings as Egyptian pharaohs. – Austin, University of Texas Press. 256 pp. ISBN 0–292–77772–8. Price \$55.00 (hardback).

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